

Promoting Learning through the IER Model of Reflection

One of the most effective practices in the area of Metacognition is that of Reflective Practice. Reflective Practice, or Reflection as it is commonly referred, has been employed for many purposes in recent literature. Authors have included reflective processes in a variety of research and scholarly activity on teachers, teaching, and learners. Reflection has been defined and used in a discrete manner bounded by each author's particular area of interest. In this section the use of reflection in research is examined and synthesized to develop a well-grounded general purpose for reflection. Reflective practice is a skill to be developed and refined in all professional areas (skillsyouneed.com, 2014).

Several authors have indicated that reflection can be used by individuals to organize experiences and build knowledge. Through reflection individuals engage in opportunities to examine experiences for the purpose of making future decisions in what Grimmer (1989) referred to as situational knowledge. The definition currently being used for situational knowledge, adapted from Grimmer's, is: the knowledge a professional possesses which may be employed in professional practice to make informed decisions, take wise action, or effectively plan for future events.

What then is the general purpose of reflection? The answer to that question is that the purpose of reflection is to allow professionals, at varying stages of professional growth and development, to organize experiences into situational knowledge needed to make informed decisions and mature in a given profession.

Stages of Reflection

Reflective practice can then be broken down into three (3) unique and essential stages (Francis, 1992). These stages include the Identification Stage, the Exploration Stage, and the Resolution Stage.

Event Identification Stage

Virtually all authors attempting to provide a conceptual framework for reflection, and the development of situational knowledge, have indicated the need for an initial focus to begin the process (eg. Schon, 1983). This initial focus, for our purposes referred to as the Event Identification Stage, is the stage of the reflective process in which a specific topic or event is identified and refined by the individual or group participating in the process.

Events may include questions or problems, hypothetical or real situations, unclear concepts or ideas, issues of professional practice, or any other issue of significance to the individual or group (Francis, 1992). In addition many authors (ex. Ferraro, 2000) view the refinement of the problem or event as a key to effective reflective practice.

The definition for an event is: a concept, problem, dilemma, question, situation, or pending action that an individual wants to discover a solution, next step, or better understand. The identification of an event or focus is critical if the process of reflection is to promote the development of individual or group situational knowledge (Wildman & Niles, 1987). In addition, the identification of an even provides a common focus for groups (Marimba, Church, & Taylor, 2011) and established effective opportunities for individuals.

Event Exploration Stage

The second stage of the reflective process is the Event Exploration Stage. Participants engaged in this stage of the reflective process use the previously identified event as the focal point, and build their understanding of the event through exploration. This stage may include discussion, elaboration, research, framing and reframing of ideas, clarification, analysis and synthesis of existing information, or other activities that help the individual or group to gain a more thorough understanding of the event, the implications, and the actions to be made in the present and the future. In the Event Exploration Stage the participants may seek out and collect information about an event, interview peers or experts on a topic, use graphic organizers, or build their own graphic organizer as a representation of the event and their exploration and understanding of the event.

It is also during the Event Exploration Stage where individuals or groups may define and clarify relationships from the current event being explored to other professional situations where similar information or ideas may be applicable (Ross, 1990). In essence the Event Exploration Stage is the “making sense of things” stage. “Making sense” (Garman, 1986) in this regard may refer to a wide variety of concepts including what Garman (1986) referred to as “construal development” Similarly Oberg (1989) described building awareness Schon (1983) referred to framing and reframing of ideas. It is also during this stage that new understandings (Lalik, Niles, & Murphy, 1989) may be developed and previous understandings by be broadened, affirmed, or reaffirmed.

Event Resolution Stage

The third stage of the reflective process is the Event Resolution Stage. It is in the Event Resolution Stage of the process that decisions about past, current, and future decisions are made based upon events that have been identified and explored in previous stages. Participants in this stage of the reflective process make use of information collected, refined, and organized in the exploration stage to arrive at answers and solutions for current and future professional situations. Participants engaged in this stage of the process plan for an action, or resolution, to take place related to their identified event. It is the relationship between the event, time, experience, and expectations that drive the participant to resolve the event (Loughran, 2014). The resolution, or closure in this stage may consist of plans for future action, a statement of belief or practice, a rationale, a demonstration of understanding, or a statement of an action to be taken.

The Event Resolution Stage represents the final portion of the definition, and practice, of reflection, which is to increase or confirm the growing body of a professional's situational knowledge. The resolution stage is intended to provide participants with the tools to make informed decisions, take wise actions, effectively plan for future actions, and broaden understandings of some identified event. In other words, participants gain a "wisdom of practice" (Grimmett, 1989) that provides them with the structure and process to use the reflective process effectively and demonstrate both situational knowledge and wisdom of practice in their professional decision making.

Summary

By using the IER Model of Reflection, participants gain opportunities to explore and refine their understandings of skills, concepts, and ideas in a wide variety of fields. The process leads to enhanced learning and understanding by participants through a sequenced and segmented process. Overall, the use of the IER Model of Reflection typically has a positive impact on participants' learning and understanding.

Dr. Ray Francis
Central Michigan University
Teacher Education and Instructional Technology